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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [UNSC](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE ELECTION: CONTINUITY, OR
A CHANGE OF DIRECTION?

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 455
[1](#)B. BRATISLAVA 436
[1](#)C. BRATISLAVA 401
[1](#)D. BRATISLAVA 450
[1](#)E. BRATISLAVA 434

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons
1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Slovak foreign policy during the second
Dzurinda government of the past four years has been extremely
complementary to U.S. interests. If the coalition that
results from June 17 parliamentary elections is led by
Dzurinda's SDKU and made up mostly of center-right parties,
we can expect continuity. A government led by Smer could be
more problematic. The party is more euro-centric and
anti-American than the current government, and its void in
foreign policy expertise is so far being filled by radicals
from Slovakia's communist and HZDS past. Membership in the
EU, NATO, and the UNSC, especially if accompanied by
coalition partners from the present government, will place
constraints on how far foreign policy can wiggle.
Nonetheless, we may have to work much harder to convince a
Smer-led government on U.S. foreign policy priorities. End
Summary.

Unlikely Candidates for the MFA Post

[1](#)2. (C) Of the eight parties most likely to enter Parliament
and potentially participate in the next governing coalition,
only a few desire to gain control of the foreign ministry.
Although the four parties described below would not run the
MFA, their philosophies would certainly influence the foreign
policy direction of any governing coalition they might join
after the elections. In some cases, this could have a
positive moderating effect, such as in a coalition of Smer
with KDH and/or SMK. In other cases it would reinforce
negative tendencies, such as in a Smer-SNS alliance. Those
that have little realistic chance to control the MFA include:

--The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH). As a member of
the governing coalition, KDH supported the active foreign
policy of the Dzurinda government. Although the party
initially opposed the invasion of Iraq, it is now in favor of
maintaining troops for humanitarian and reconstruction work
as long as the elected Iraqi government deems necessary. KDH
hopes for a gradual drawdown that would bring Slovak soldiers
home within four years. Leaders of the party are
particularly active on human rights issues, for example
supporting dissidents in Cuba. On the other hand, KDH is
Euro-skeptic (it fears European liberal ideas will be forced
upon Slovakia's more religiously-conservative population) and

tends to be somewhat isolationist in outlook. Its highest foreign policy priority is passing domestic legislation to implement the treaty Slovakia signed with the Vatican. KDH's determination to stand up against the European mainstream on social issues such as abortion and homosexual partnerships makes many Europeans wary of this conservative party. Chairman Pavol Hrusovsky recently told the Ambassador that KDH would favor the justice and interior ministries, and acknowledged European skepticism toward a possible KDH foreign minister (ref A). We don't see anyone within the party who would fight hard for the MFA post, although former Interior Minister Vladimir Palko has told people he might be interested.

--The Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK). Like the KDH, the SMK was very supportive of the Dzurinda government's foreign policy goals. Countering the recent announcement that Smer would consider immediately withdrawing troops from Iraq if elected, SMK leader Bela Bugar expressed the unequivocal intent to stay as long as necessary. One of the two State Secretaries (Deputy Ministers) at the MFA for the past four years has been SMK appointee Jozsef Berenyi, and although we have not been extremely impressed by his intellect or his leadership, he has always been willing to implement the policies we advocated. SMK could be a responsible partner, but will not control the MFA; the 90 percent of the population that is ethnic Slovak would reject an SMK personality as the face of Slovakia to the world. As one MFA insider put it, "Slovakia is still not ready for a Hungarian foreign minister."

--The Slovak National Party (SNS). This party is unapologetically isolationist, and has little interest in foreign affairs. SNS opposed Slovak membership in NATO, although it would not attempt to leave the treaty now. The party accepts EU membership, but is against further political integration (ref B). It would prefer to withdraw all troops from Iraq immediately, and limit involvement of foreign troops abroad in general. We have heard that European political groups have expressed strong reservations to various Slovak political parties about SNS. While there is still a chance the party could be included in a future governing coalition, we doubt it would have great influence on foreign policy issues.

--The Slovak Communist Party (KSS). The foreign policy stance of KSS closely resembles that of SNS. The party would pull troops not only from Iraq, but from all foreign missions. Pollsters say this party will get into parliament only if voter turnout is very low. KSS does not expect to be in the next government (ref C), let alone control the MFA.

A Vote for Continuity

13. (C) Several parties with the potential to control the MFA after elections would likely continue the pro-U.S. outlook and robust "transformational diplomacy" activities that have been the status quo. Of these friendly parties, the SDKU has the best chance of forming the future government and implementing a strong policy. The other parties have good foreign policy goals, but would likely be pressured to compromise in a government led by a party with different principles. The "continuity" parties include:

--The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU). The party of Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda and Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan is instinctively pro-American and favors active engagement in the world, especially in Slovakia's foreign policy "niche capabilities" of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Belarus. This pro-U.S. stance predominates throughout the MFA. U.S. talking points or non-papers are always included in Kukan's briefing book for GAERC meetings and other international assemblies. The foreign ministry is extremely receptive and responsive at all levels to U.S. demarches and information, and has worked closely with us on occasion to change the stream of thought within the EU, for example on Belarus and Cuba.

What may change if the SDKU holds onto the MFA reins is the Foreign Minister. Kukan would like to continue in the post, and his chief of staff told us that Fico has already asked if he would stay at the helm even in a Smer-led government (Kukan said yes). Kukan is the longest-serving foreign minister in the EU and respected by his peers. He is also widely respected by his own MFA staff, several of whom have told us they are proud to work for him. On the other hand, he is 66 years old and has served as foreign minister for eight years already. One leading candidate for the post if Kukan steps down is current State Secretary Magda Vasaryova, a former actress who founded the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, ran unsuccessfully for president, served as Ambassador in Austria and Poland, and has a high position on the SDKU candidate list. Her stage presence is great, although her depth of knowledge doesn't always come through. Another said to want the job is career diplomat Maros Sefcovic, Slovakia's Ambassador in Brussels (to both the EU and bilateral missions). In our view, MFA political director and diplomatic superstar Miroslav Lajcak could be another strong candidate.

--Free Forum (SF). Weeks ago it seemed like Free Forum was a sure bet for a minor role in any future government. Internal party problems now make it doubtful that the party will make it into parliament (septel). On the off-chance the party survives, it would be a good choice to head the MFA. Party leaders have told us they agree completely with the foreign policy of the Dzurinda government and would not make drastic changes. Free Forum's foreign policy expert is former-diplomat-turned-think-tank-brain Ivo Lancaric. However, more likely candidates for the MFA post are former-Ambassador to the U.S. Martin Butora and current Ambassador to the U.S. Rastislav Kacer, both of whom are close to SF leader Zuzana Martinakova.

--Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). The party of Vladimir Meciar once earned Slovakia the label "black hole of Europe." Desperation to overcome that legacy has resulted in a party whose foreign policy is largely consistent with that of the current government. HZDS MPs supported controversial foreign policy questions such as expanding the mandate for Slovak troops in Iraq, when even some members of the coalition government opposed them. In addition, though

Meciar's anti-democratic tendencies delayed Slovakia's entrance to NATO and could have derailed EU membership as well, since the 2002 election campaign, HZDS has been as pro-NATO and pro-EU as anyone (ref D). One weakness we foresee is support for transformational diplomacy carried out by NGOs. Because many Slovak NGOs were formed to advance democratic principles in Slovakia and thwart then-PM Meciar, HZDS continues to view them with distrust. HZDS Vice-Chair Milan Urbani has been courting the favor of the U.S. and EU embassies, in an aggressive attempt to convince us Meciar is a changed man who should now be internationally "acceptable."

We are not yet convinced, and therefore we cannot imagine Meciar as foreign minister. Rather, Urbani himself has admitted he covets the post. He is not qualified, in our view.

Smer: Reason for Concern

14. (C) The party that will likely win a plurality of votes and could form the next government is also the party most likely to present the greatest challenges to U.S. foreign policy goals: Robert Fico's Smer ("Direction"). Smer's instincts are Euro-centric, and slightly anti-American, seeing no need to differ from "older, more experienced" EU members on foreign policy issues. The party lacks members with substantive expertise, and instead forms policy stances based on public opinion polls. Smer's inattention to foreign policy issues, uncertainty about its international priorities, and direct hints to us that the party is not seeking the MFA lead us to believe Smer could let this post could go to a coalition partner. Nonetheless, Slovakia under

Fico would be less likely to be out front on democracy promotion and other transformational diplomacy initiatives, or to follow the U.S. lead on key international issues.

15. (C) At a June 6 foreign policy conference organized by Smer's new think-tank ASA ("Analyses, Strategies, Alternatives"), speakers ranted against globalization, U.S. unilateralism, and the "dangerous" foreign policies of the Dzurinda government. The assembled crowd was made up mostly of former Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and Slovak Democratic Left (SDL) members (including former HZDS Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavol Hamzik). Radovan Geist -- political scientist, Smer darling, and editor of the SDL newspaper "Slovo" ("word") -- argued that Slovaks prefer multilateral approaches and that they, even more than other Europeans, want the EU to be the counterbalance to U.S. hegemony. Czech citizen Oskar Krejci, Dean of the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Faculty at Matej Bel University (where many of Slovakia's future diplomats study) said it is an illusion that Slovakia can have any affect on U.S. unilateralism. He added that the role of NATO is decreasing, which is not a bad thing because the Alliance has become a tool of U.S. interests. Krejci was exposed later in the evening by Slovak television as a former State Security "Rezident" (a most trusted agent under Communism). Economist Peter Stanek warned that if left unchecked, foreign companies would soon flood Slovakia's economy, only to pull out in 8-10 years and leave it in ruins. Then, in a conclusion that made us wonder if he had even been paying attention to the other speakers, Smer's Shadow Foreign Minister Juraj Zervan (himself a mid-level Slovak diplomat) assured the crowd that a Smer government's foreign policy posture would not be radically different from the current government.

16. (C) Just as worrisome was a conversation we had with Zervan and Smer MP Boris Zala on the margins. When Pol-Ec Chief praised the active work of the GOS and Slovak NGOs in supporting transformational diplomacy, expressing hope this would continue after the elections, Zala responded that the NGOs had been founded in opposition to former PM Vladimir Meciar and therefore could not be trusted. A common theme at the event was that Slovakia, as a small country, was a consumer of foreign policy rather than one of its creators. Zervan told the audience that Slovak people did not see a need to play a role in democracy promotion efforts abroad; he suggested, for example, that Slovakia follow the lead of older EU members with experience in specific regions, such as Spain when dealing with Cuba. Our message must have sunk in a little bit, because in a June 12 meeting with the DCM Zala claimed that he understands Slovakia's responsibilities and value-added in the international arena, and said a Smer-led government would maintain funding to NGOs.

Would Fico Really Be So Stupid?

17. (C) Various interlocutors have told us that ASA does not have any real influence on the top Smer politicians. Rather, it provides a forum for marginal members to air their views and feel like they are heard. The attitude of the young Smer staff members who helped organize the ASA assembly was telling; they were barely able to hide their disdain for some of the speakers. A representative from NGO Pontis later confided that he had been approached by Smer's international secretary during the coffee break who encouraged him to ask

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tough questions and "burn Zervan!"

18. (C) As former-SDL leader and now professor of foreign affairs Peter Weiss reassured emboffs, "I know Robert Fico very well. He is my political child. He would never be so stupid." He might not be, but the problem is that we do not see another generation of real advisors. The party's more reasonable vice-chairmen want other ministries, such as health (Pavol Paska) and defense (Robert Kalinak). This leaves a void that, at the moment, is being filled by radicals from the "bad old days."

Smer on Iraq: Do They Mean It or Not?

¶9. (C) Zala told DCM that Smer would have to keep its recently-announced commitment to voters to withdraw troops from Iraq. Nonetheless, Zala claimed a Smer-led government would consult with the U.S. and coalition partners to discuss an orderly withdrawal. We told Zala that consultation would represent a change in Smer's modus operandi, since it neglected to consult with the Iraqi government or us prior to issuing its surprise statement calling for withdrawal (ref E). We also reminded him that the new Iraqi government wanted coalition members to stay for the time being and that the situation on the ground in Iraq -- not domestic politics -- should determine future Slovak plans. Former Meciar-era Foreign Minister Hamzik quietly told us June 6 that Smer's promise to withdraw Slovak troops was only a campaign tool that should not be taken seriously.

¶10. (C) Likewise, Smer Vice Chairman and chair of parliament's Foreign Affairs committee Pavol Paska did his best to convince DCM during a June 6 meeting in his home town of Kosice that Smer's vitriolic statement on Iraq was just a political effort to attract more votes. Paska said that Smer would not control the MFA in any coalition it led, and would have to adjust its foreign policy to its partners, most of whom are more in favor of Slovak efforts in Iraq. He claimed that Slovaks at several rallies throughout Slovakia have asked Fico to withdraw the troops. Paska said that a Smer-led government would not at all change Slovakia's stance toward NATO. (Comment: We appreciated Paska's comments, but reminded him that, given Smer's recent record of telling us one thing and doing another, we could only take his information at face value. End Comment.)

Constraints on Foreign Policy

¶11. (C) Despite the disturbing trends in Smer, and particularly a Smer that might align itself with SNS if it felt necessary, there is a limit to how drastically Slovakia's foreign policy could change. Slovakia could not strike out alone against 24 other EU member states, although its voice within the EU might not be as loud on democracy promotion in Belarus, Cuba, and the Balkans. Smer might be less willing to confront Russia than the current government, for example, but would not take a stance against the EU consensus. Fico had at one point envisioned a Paroubek-Gyurcsany-Fico center-left block in the EU, but those hopes have been dashed with the Czech stalemate. There will be tremendous pressure on Slovakia to meet its commitments to NATO, and to have a well-considered position on UNSC issues through December 2007.

¶12. (C) Another point that will work to the U.S. advantage in influencing foreign policy after the elections, even in the worst-case scenario, is that the professionals within the MFA and MOD recognize Slovakia's commitments and will continue to do their jobs. Many of them rode out the Meciar years, and they are not strangers to working for Slovak interests even under a government they may not personally support. The U.S. has laid good groundwork for future cooperation by treating Slovak interlocutors as partners, and engaging them consistently.

¶13. (C) Finally, despite all the rhetoric coming from various elements of the party, we do believe it will be somewhat subdued if Smer has to face the reality of governing. Right now, the party needs to leave space for ideologues from the left, who were absorbed into Smer when it merged with SDL. Paska confirmed this to the DCM, saying Smer is concentrating on older, more reliable voters for support after learning its lesson in 2002 when youth supporters didn't turn out. We trust that operating within the limits of the EU, NATO, the UN, and other international commitments, a government led by Smer would have to behave more responsibly than its campaign rhetoric implies, but our efforts to help make this happen

under a Smer-led government will have to be considerably more intensive.

VALLEE